



# CommercePeople

APRIL 1991

## Woman Inventor Makes Patent History

Story on page 3.

U.S. PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE



# Inside Commerce

by Erika Morphy

**T**hanks to a new federal pay law, federal workers know right now what kind of pay raise they will get next January: a 4.2 percent increase.

Unless the nation is in a national economic emergency in August, the 1992 pay raise is considered pre-approved by Congress and the White House. The new law ties general federal raises to private-sector pay changes as measured by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The amount set will be the designated raise for the following year.

In addition, there will be geographic pay adjustments in future years, and the president retains the authority to grant special cost-of-living adjustments (up to 8 percent) to cities where the government is having recruiting problems.

This year, New York City, Los Angeles and San Francisco got the full 8 percent adjustments on top of the 4.1 percent general pay increase.

Local federal workers won't know until early next year if they qualify for special raises.

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MBDA has two new top-level appointees. Jose Lira, the current MBDA acting director, has been elevated to director. William Bailey, currently MBDA associate director of operations, will become the new deputy director.

*In January, BXA hosted its first Bronze Awards program. Recipients were Johnson Jerry, for outstanding supervisor, Stephen Leacy for outstanding professional employee, Anita McNamee for performance in productivity and quality improvement, and Andrea Jones for outstanding technical support. The Western Regional Office was recognized as BXA's outstanding group. The four groups and eight individuals who were runner-ups for the award were also recognized at the ceremony. Displaying her award is Andrea Jones, flanked by Robert Kugelman, director of administration, on the right and Under Secretary Dennis Kloske on the left.*



*William Utlaug, director of NTIA's Institute for Telecommunication Sciences (ITS) in Boulder, Colo., has received the Meritorious Executive Rank Award. Utlaug's accomplishments in the telecommunications sciences and his management of ITS earned him this recognition.*



*Richard Strauch and Kenneth Moran, NOAA scientists in Boulder, Colo., were two of three researchers presented the World Meteorological Organization (WMO)'s Professor Vilho Vaisala Award. The award is given annually for an outstanding research paper which stimulates interest in the organization's programs. Strauch and Moran, along with Peter May in Australia, wrote a research paper discussing the accuracy of a system they developed for determining atmospheric temperatures at various altitudes. The award was presented by WMO Secretary General G.O.P. Obasi, who flew from Geneva to Boulder for the ceremony. Obasi congratulates Richard Strauch and Kenneth Moran, right, for winning the Vaisala award.*





## Hall of Fame

*Gertrude Elion,  
honored by  
the National  
Inventors Hall  
of Fame for her  
pioneering drug  
research work.*



## First Woman Inducted

By Oscar Mastin

**N**obel prizewinning scientist and inventor Gertrude B. Elion and seven other outstanding inventors have been elected to the National Inventors Hall of Fame.

The recognition will make Elion the first woman to take a place alongside inventors like Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison in the National Inventors Hall of Fame since it was established 18 years ago.

Elion graduated from Hunter College with top honors in 1937 — a time when most women did not even go to college — and went on to receive a master's degree in chemistry.

"I was a maverick," said Elion. The 73-year-old scientist said she believed her nomination was important to women, "who need to have some encouragement that they can achieve whatever anybody else can."

Elion was elected for synthesizing drugs crucial to both cancer and antiviral treatment. In 1988, she shared the Nobel Prize in Medicine with George Hitchings, her collaborator for over 40 years. Elion holds about 40 patents.

Other inductees are:

- Gordon Gould, for the optically pumped laser amplifier. In 1957 he developed the ideas that led to the first laser, and was the first to use the acronym laser, for light amplification by stimulated emissions of radiation. After protracted litigation, he received the first of several laser patents in 1977.
- Leonard Greene, recognized for the stall warning indicator he patented in 1946 which became standard on aircraft throughout the world.
- W.E. "Butch" Hansford, inducted for his invention of polyurethane. This material is the basis of many products used today, including polyurethane insulation, safety padding, and carpeting.

In addition to Elion, Gould, Green and Hansford, there are three inventors being honored posthumously:

- Elmer Sperry, honored for his invention of the gyrocompass, the first practical application of gyroscopic control to shipping and aviation. At the time of his death in 1930, Sperry held over 400 patents in the fields of electricity, mining, transportation and gyroscopes.
- Robert Williams, for his discovery of vitamin B1 (thiamine) which prevents the disease beriberi. He also invented a method of mass-producing thiamine. Williams died in 1965.
- Willard Bennett, recognized for his lightweight radio frequency mass spectrometer. His device was crucial to space exploration and was used on the first space satellite — the Soviet Sputnik. He died in 1987.

Secretary Mosbacher paid tribute to this year's eight inductees. "Honoring these great inventors emphasizes the important role of innovation in keeping American competitiveness and quality ahead in the world economy," Mosbacher said. "The National Invention Center at the Hall of Fame is becoming a clearinghouse for creativity."

The candidates will be formally inducted May 17 in Akron, Ohio. This is the second year Akron has hosted the Hall of Fame induction ceremony since being named as the new site of the hall in 1987.

So far, 94 inventors have been named to the Hall of Fame since its establishment in 1973. "I'm happy to be the first woman," said Elion. "But I doubt I'll be the last."



# A Better Idea

By Oscar Mastin

**D**o you have a better idea for a new process, machine or manufacture? If you do, make your first stop the Patent and Trademark Office. PTO, which administers patents and trademarks, has been rewarding inventors with patents since 1790.

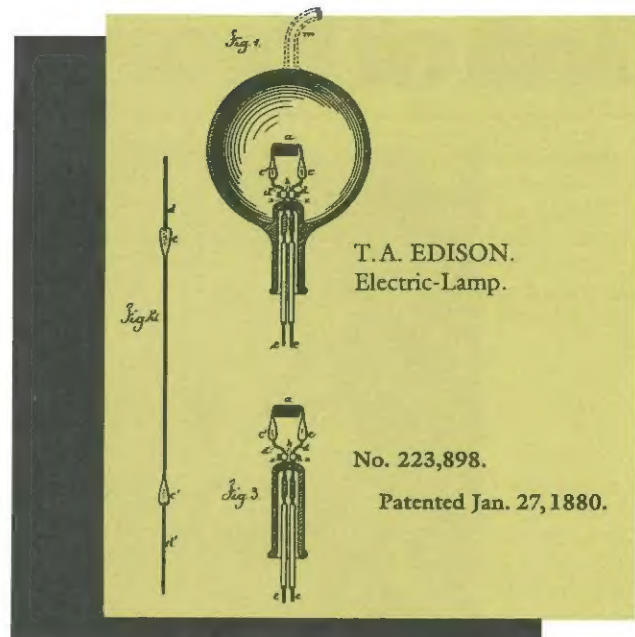
A patent is *not*, as many believe, an automatic passport to guaranteed riches and a place in the National Inventors Hall of Fame. A patent is, however, a grant to the inventor for the exclusive right to make, use or sell an invention for a period of 17 years.

So if an invention has market value, its inventor could become very rich and famous. Then again, his or her invention could go the way of patent No. 1,661,036, the grapefruit shield, designed to protect people from a squirt in the eye. Or patent No. 395,515, the chewing gum locket, a device for holding used gum "with safety, cleanliness, and convenience."

Excluding the grapefruit shield and chewing gum locket, almost every patent has had its impact on the industrialization of America. There are thousands of inventions on file at the Patent and Trademark Office which have changed the world: Patent No. 223,898 was issued to Thomas Edison for his invention of an "electric lamp for giving light by incandescence." Patent No. 821,393 went to Wilbur and Orville Wright for "new and useful improvements in flying machines," and Alexander Graham Bell's "telegraphy" invention became patent No. 174,465.

Today PTO issues between 80,000 and 100,000 patents a year. Since the system's beginning in 1790, the office's work has mushroomed from an annual issuance rate of three patents in 1790 to 65 in 1802, to nearly 600 in 1836. In 1911, PTO passed a major milestone when it issued the 1 millionth patent. Eighty years later, PTO has issued the 5 millionth patent.

PTO's staff has also mushroomed — from one person in 1790 to 4,500 today. Half these people are highly skilled specialists who work as patent application examiners. The other half are support personnel. When a patent application enters the office — which they do at the rate of over 100,000 a year — it is routed to examiners knowledgeable in the field.



For example, an application for an improvement in the telephone would be sent to Group 260, "Telephone and Telegraphy." An invention relating to pharmacy would be sent to Group 120, "Medicines, Poisons and Cosmetics." The examiner's job is to study the application to see if it meets the criteria of patentability. In short, it must be new.

To check an application's novelty, an examiner compares the patent application for a new invention against patents in the same field which have already been issued. In addition, that part or aspect of the invention which the inventor claims as new must be "unobvious." For example, an inventor cannot receive a patent for a gear made of plastic, when there is a similar gear already in existence, but is made out of metal. Finally, the invention must fall under the categories "machine, process, manufacture or composition of matter." Patents are not granted, for example, on ideas which have no practical application.

An inventor's chance of meeting these criteria are better than ever. In 1990, over 96,000 patents were granted out of 174,000 applications. On the average, "pendency time," or the time between application and issue of the patent, is just slightly over 18 months. This marks a great improvement over pendency time in past years. As recently as the early 1960s, the average patent took three and a half years to issue.

So if you've got a better idea, research it and submit it to the Patent and Trademark Office. Who knows? You could be the next Thomas Edison.



# PTO Issues Patent No. 5,000,000

**T**he Patent and Trademark Office passed another milestone when Secretary Mosbacher awarded the five millionth patent to the University of Florida for the invention of a process that makes ethanol, a clean substitute for gasoline. Donald Price, vice-president of research, accepted the patent on behalf of the university at the ceremony, which was held at the Hoover building on March 19.

"Patent No. 5,000,000 is an important milestone for the Patent and Trademark Office, and for the nation," said Mosbacher. "It comes at a time when the technological innovation encouraged by patent rights is critical to our international competitiveness."

University President John Lombardi noted the importance of the invention to the environmental problems the world is currently facing. "It is particularly gratifying that the University of Florida discovery could play such a significant role in solving some of this country's most pressing problems," he said.

The new process can convert a broad range of organic matter — including agricultural waste, yard trash and newspapers — into ethanol, commonly known as grain alcohol. A possible application of the new technology would be to drastically reduce the trash going into landfills, while simultaneously producing an environmentally benign fuel.

For the past 200 years PTO has been encouraging innovators to develop scientific, engineering and manufacturing advances that would maintain America as a leader among

nations. The patent clause was written into the Constitution in 1790, and soon after was ready for its first client, Samuel Hopkins, who invented an improvement in the manufacture of soapmaking. From this modest start, PTO has gone on to reach several milestones:

- Patent No. 1,000,000 was issued to Francis Holton in 1911. Holton invented a solid automobile tire which was thought at the time to be a probable replacement for air-filled tires.
- Patent No. 2,000,000 was issued in 1935 to Joseph

Ledwinka for an automobile wheel rim that permitted tires to be more securely fastened to the rim.

- Patent No. 3,000,000 went to Kenneth Eldredge in 1960 for an automatic reading device which led to the electronic check-reading system now used by banks nationwide.
- Patent No. 4,000,000 was awarded in 1976 to Robert Mendenhall for the development of a recycling system, now in use in many parts of the country, for asphalt aggregates used in road surfacing.

## PTO Hosts 19th Inventors Expo

*At last year's expo, Deputy Commissioner Douglas Comer stops to chat with one of the exhibitors.*

**P**TO will host its 19th annual National Inventors Expo June 8-9 in the Hoover building. Fifty independent inventors and 15 companies will show their latest patented innovations.

An inventors and entrepreneurs conference will be held on June 10. Speakers will discuss how to be a successful inventor, how to market an invention, how to obtain venture capital, and marketing techniques. The conference is co-sponsored by the Patent and Trademark Office, the Intellectual Property Owners Inc., and the Smithsonian Institute.







Trademark application for pins

# Trademark Office Hit Hard



Trademark application for T-shirts, posters and other promotional materials

## by Gulf War Onslaught

**T**he war in the Persian Gulf had an impact on most federal agencies. Some lost key personnel who were called to active duty, others were flooded with calls about the war, and just about every federal facility tightened its security at the start of Operation Desert Storm.

But the war's impact on the PTO's trademark office was unique. The Trademark Examining Operation (TMEO) reports that over 100 applicants sought to register such marks as "Desert Shield," "Operation Desert Shield," "Operation Desert Shield in God We Trust," "Desert Shield America Supports You," "Desert Storm," and "Operation Desert Storm" for their various products.

Why the onslaught? David Bucher, director of TMEO, suggests an attempt to cash in on terms which are probably recognized by most of the American population.

"It's likely that the high degree of public support for the war, and the near complete name recognition for Desert Shield and Desert Storm, spurred on many a would-be business person."

Applicants range from budding individual entrepreneurs to large, well-known companies such as Textron and Zale, both submitting applications to register trademarks for watches; the Mead Corp. for stationery supplies; Mattel for toy vehicles; and Atari for video game software.

Altogether, there is a diverse range of goods and services vying for variations of Desert Storm and Desert Shield trademarks. Sun block, sunglasses, T-shirts, footwear, watches, action toys, board games, video games, cigarettes, stationery, fireworks, bicycles, and computer equipment are a few examples.

With so many applicants seeking registration for similar trademarks, TMEO has much to consider.

A trademark cannot be issued if there is a likelihood of consumer confusion as to the source of the trademark. For example, if a paper supply company requests registration for a Desert Storm trademark, and there is already a Desert Storm trademark existing for toy trucks, TMEO would operate on the assumption that the average consumer would not get confused between the two. However, if that company produced toy knives instead of paper, TMEO would probably refuse to issue registration, because the average consumer might think the same company made both the toy trucks and toy knives.

So, when two or more applicants seek registration of the same mark for the same type of good or service, the first to apply gains an advantage over later applicants. That is why the first two days of Desert Storm operations led to such a rush of applications.

For example, Mattel Inc. filed an application to register Desert Storm for toy vehicles on Jan. 22. However, three other companies beat Mattel to the punch. Buddy L. Corp. of New York, Diversified Specialists Inc. of Houston, and Lewis Galoob Toys Inc. of San Francisco all filed application registration of the same mark for toy vehicles on Jan. 17.

While TMEO will have to resort to administrative "tiebreakers" to determine which of the first three applications is considered first in line for examination, Mattel is clearly fourth in line. In this case, fourth is no worse than second. If the first applicant meets the requirements and obtains a registration of Desert Storm for toy vehicles, the office will refuse to issue registration to the other applicants.

One issue that will not be considered is whether all the applications should be refused across the board due to some superior right vested in the military, or any





Trademark application for commemorative pins & plaques



Trademark application for T-shirts, posters and other promotional materials



Trademark application for cigarettes



Trademark application for gift packages of paper goods

other branch of the government. There is no law which expressly prohibits private individuals or companies from using names the U.S. armed forces gives individual military operations.

There is, however, one section of the Trademark Act which does prohibit registration of a mark if it suggests a connection with a federal agency or another branch of the government. For example, consumers might conclude that weaponry or desert survival goods with the Desert Storm logo was issued by the U.S. armed forces. They are less likely to reach that conclusion when the term is used to market toy vehicles.

"In the case of most of the Desert Shield and Desert Storm applications currently pending in TMEQ," Bucher says, "I suspect most consumers will not think either the Pentagon or the Bush administration has provided official approval for the use of these terms on, for example, scouring powders, colognes, bicycles, or any of the other goods and services which are listed in the applications."

Was the TMEQ staff surprised by the onslaught of applications? No. Every time a fad becomes popular with the general public, people all over the country rush to register what seems to them an original idea.

"I have always been amused by the dozens of enterprising American citizens and businesses that seek to quickly exploit, for commercial gain, the news of the day," Bucher said.



# International Trade Administration



*The Gulf Reconstruction Center has been logging in thousands of calls each day. Here, ITA Trade Specialist Jack Coffey assists a caller.*

## Secretary Inaugurates Gulf Reconstruction Center

*Secretary Mosbacher, left, Kuwaiti Ambassador Sa'ud Al-Sabah, center, and Deputy Under Secretary Rockwell Schnabel relax in the Secretary's office before the inauguration ceremony.*



**N**ow that the guns have silenced, the sound of construction will take their place in Kuwait. With the cost of reconstruction estimated at \$100 billion, an enormous building task lies ahead.

To assist and advise U.S. firms seeking commercial opportunities in the Middle East — and the Gulf in particular — the Gulf Reconstruction Center began operations at the Hoover building.

Television cameras and news reporters crowded the second floor corridor outside room 2041 when Secretary Mosbacher inaugurated the center March 4. The secretary was joined by Kuwaiti Ambassador Sa'ud Al-Sabah and the chief of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Lt. Gen. Henry Hatch.

"Now that there is a cessation of hostilities, the peoples, industries and resources of this important region are open for business," said Mosbacher. "Working with the Kuwaiti government and planning experts of the Corps of Engineers, we're moving ahead on the blueprints for reconstruction."

The Engineer Corps has a \$46 million contract from the Kuwaitis for initial damage assessment and design work. Mosbacher said the corps would be critical in getting the reconstruction work underway.

The rebuilding plan has two stages. The first 90 days, the focus will be on

emergency relief and damage assessment. Food, water, medicine and communications will get first priority, along with putting out fires at hundreds of oil wells and installations torched by the Iraqis.

Phase two will cover the next 90 days, which includes detailed damaged assessment and design work. The extensive rebuilding projects, which are expected to take several years, will begin during this phase.

Reiterating his government's vow not to "forget our friends who have stood by us in our time of need," Al-Sabah said contractors from the U.S., Britain, France, and other members of the coalition will receive preference. Almost 300 contracts worth over \$5 million have already been awarded for the first phase. More than 70 percent of the contracts have gone to U.S. companies.

Secretary Mosbacher emphasizes that the actual reconstruction will be done by private companies, not the U.S. government. The center functions as an information clearinghouse, putting interested parties in touch with agencies involved in the rebuilding of Kuwait. "The Gulf Reconstruction Center is merely an information gateway, a starting point for American business interested in gulf reconstruction," Mosbacher said.

The center, which has a full-time staff operating 16 telephones, is logging in 5,000 calls a day. Everyone from construction workers interested in working in the Gulf to companies wishing to supply non-perishable food to the Kuwaitis have contacted the center. Half the calls have been from individuals seeking employment.

The center occupies four rooms belonging to the Commerce Department's Near East offices, but with a new sign on the door. Trade specialists take two-hour shifts each day to handle the deluge.

Interested businesses can reach the center at (202) 377-5737 or (202) 377-5767.



# Commerce Awards Eleven Grants to Advance Technology

**S**ecretary Mosbacher has announced the granting of the first awards under the department's Advanced Technology Program (ATP), which he said could lead to the birth of revolutionary products and boost American competitiveness.

The 11 grants will provide approximately \$9 million the first year to initiate nearly \$100 million in research and development programs over the next five years. More than half of the cost is paid by the firms receiving the grants.

"Nearly half of these projects are proposed by industrial consortia-partnerships between large and small companies that were formed to work on solutions to key technological barriers in their industries," Mosbacher said. "The remainder of the proposals are from individual corporations."

George Uriano, director of ATP, said the agency was financing projects that fall between basic research and

technology development. The technologies involved include improved manufacturing techniques for electronics (such as X-ray lithography), optical recording, a variety of hardware and software technology for computers, high temperature superconductivity, machine tool control, and novel laser designs.

Uriano said the program had received 250 proposals and that the winners had been judged on scientific, technical, and commercial merit.

"This demonstrates the new spirit of cooperation that I see between industry and government, between industry and academia, and within industry itself—a spirit that the Advanced Technology Program was designed to foster," the secretary said.

The programs we have selected for this round of ATP grants have the potential to spawn revolutionary new products and processes in several key industries."

## Current Issues In Technology

The Commerce Science and Technology Fellowship Program (ComSci) is sponsoring a seminar May 2 in the Hoover building auditorium. Topics on the agenda include Critical Technologies, R&D Priorities and Trends, Networking: Promoting Industry Access to Technological Resources, Professionals in Science and Technology: Trends and Needs, and Enhancing Manufacturing Performance of U.S. Industry.

All interested persons are invited to attend. For more information and preregistration, contact:

**Florence Feinburg,**  
**(202) 377-5804.**

The seminar will last all day.

# Fire Causes Paperwork Delays

**A** three-alarm fire on March 6 at the Germantown, Md. NOAA Management Service Center was the second fire at a department facility in three months—the first was at the NTIS Springfield, Va. facility last December.

The center processes the majority of financial transactions for the department.

The damage, which was mainly on the third floor of the three-story building, has affected travel and transportation payments, imprest reimbursement and payments, purchase orders, grants, utilities, and invoice processing.

Some employees in the Washington metropolitan area may experience delays in processing of travel, transportation, and imprest fund transactions.

Frank Digialleonardo, acting director for information systems and finance,

suggests that employees who have not done so already should resubmit all documents submitted to the center after Feb. 25. Also, copies of travel vouchers and advances must be resigned to provide original signatures.

In spite of the damage, it was still business as usual for the center. By March 11, a temporary processing site had been set up in Rockville, Md., to handle the incoming transactions. And by the end of the month, the Germantown facility was back in operation.

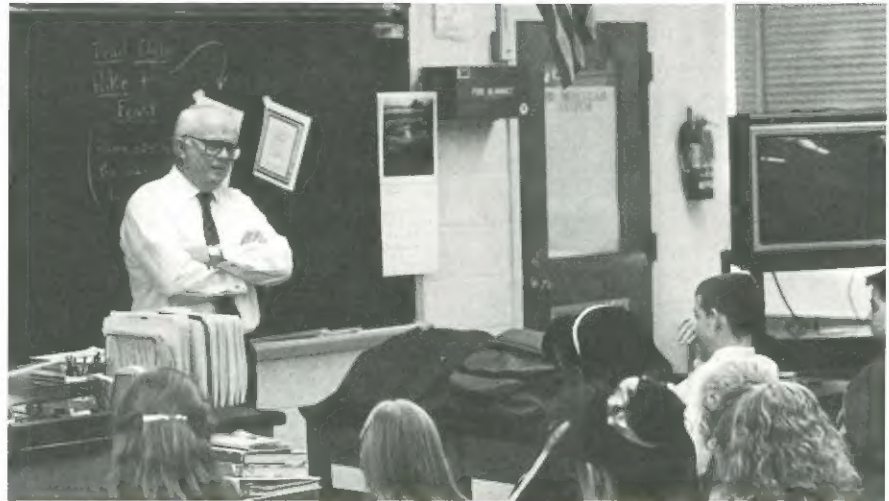


# NIST Engineers Go "Back To School" for National Engineers Week

**N**IST Director John W. Lyons recently taught classes at two Gaithersburg, Md., schools as part of an annual "teach-in" aimed at promoting science, math, and engineering careers to students. Lyons taught an honors physics class, a ninth grade experimental engineering class, and two eighth grade honors science classes.

"My hope is that I interested some of the students in engineering or science careers, students who otherwise would not have been interested," said Lyons. He added that he would like to encourage other students to learn more about science because "it is crucial to be scientifically literate in today's society."

Lyons was one of 21 "all-stars" who volunteered time to schools throughout the country during National Engineers Week, Feb. 17-23. The all-star team was made up of U.S. business and technology leaders and included astronauts, military generals, chief executive officers from private business, and members of Congress.



*NIST Director John Lyons is teacher for the day for the eighth grade honors science class at Montgomery Village Intermediate School.*

The all-star teach-in was part of a huge student outreach program called Discover "E" that sent an estimated 10,000 volunteer engineers to the nation's schools, reaching more than one million students. At NIST, more than 50 engineers volunteered their services to 11 schools in Montgomery County, Md. Events ranged from classroom visits and demonstrations to extracurricular activities such as judging science projects.

NIST's involvement with National Engineers Week is one of the agency's

nearly 20 volunteer outreach activities aimed at bolstering science and engineering education.

Besides setting the stage for the teach-in, National Engineers Week also featured special programs nationwide, from exhibits of environmental engineering projects to awards recognizing outstanding government engineers.

National Engineers Week and Discover "E" were sponsored by the National Engineers Week Committee. The events were chaired by the Society of Automotive Engineers Inc.

## WANTED: Commerce News

**C**ommerce People is for and about Commerce people activities. We rely on you – Commerce employees – to help keep us informed about what's happening in your part of the department. If you have a story idea, please let us know!

Perhaps a coworker has done something special, and deserves recognition. Or maybe you or your department have won an award and would like to tell us about it.

Due to space limitations, we can't promise that we will use every idea, but we invite you to submit them for consideration. Black and white photos are welcome. No polaroids, please.

We would really like to hear about what's happening in your corner of Commerce!

Send your story ideas to Editor, COMMERCE PEOPLE, U.S. Department of Commerce, HCHB – Room 5058, Washington, D.C. 20230.



## Consumer Corner: A Guide to Safe Travel

**Q.** I am thinking about going abroad for my vacation this year. What can I do to make sure I have a safe trip?

**A.** Before you go, call the State Department's 24-hour travel advisory number at (202) 647-5225. Also, your travel agent and the airlines should know about the advisories and conditions in specific countries.

Make copies of your credit cards, itinerary, airline ticket, passport ID page, and other important documents to leave with family or friends while you are gone. And check with your health and personal property insurance companies to see if you are covered overseas.

These are just a few of the many tips in the State Department's publication "A Safe Trip Abroad." It is available for \$1 from: R. Woods (Publication 154X), Consumer Information Center-V, P.O. Box 100, Pueblo, Colo. 81002. Make the check payable to Superintendent of Documents.

**Q.** I recently moved from Indianapolis and used a nationwide moving company to move. They damaged some of my things during the move and refused to pay the claim I submitted. What can I do?

**A.** Contact the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) at (202) 275-7148 for the regional office to look into your complaint. The ICC can make sure your claim was handled properly, but they can't require the company to resolve it the way you'd like. If an agreement can't be reached with the company, you might want to contact the American Movers Conference, Household Goods Dispute Settlement Program, 2200 Mill Road, Alexandria, Va. 22314, (703) 838-1930.

**Q.** I saw an ad from a company that promised jobs in Australia. Before I send them my \$50, how can I find out if it is legitimate?

**A.** Check with your state attorney general's office to see if your state requires employment agencies or personnel placement services to be licensed. If so, ask what agency licenses these services and then check to see that the company is, in fact, licensed. Then contact state and local consumer protection agencies where the business is located to see if complaints or actions have been filed against them.

You should also consider other possible sources of information about overseas jobs which won't cost you money. Check with the Washington embassies of the countries where you'd like to work, trade associations and trade magazines, and American companies with overseas offices for information about job openings.

**Q.** Isn't there a law that says manufacturers have to keep spare parts for products for seven years?

**A.** No. We get this question regularly, but the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) tells us that there are no federal rules about this. However, manufacturers must be able to fulfill the terms of their product warranties. This usually means that they have to keep spare parts for the length of the warranty. You might want to talk to your state attorney general's office to see if there are any state laws that apply.

**Q.** My insurance company won't pay the full amount of my hospital claim and I'm sure they're in violation of the policy agreement. Who can help me?

**A.** Insurance is regulated at the state level, so contact your Insurance Commissioner's office. They'll look into your complaint.

**Q.** I read that the federal government has run down houses for sale for \$1. How can I find out about the sales in the Washington area?

**A.** The department of Housing and Urban Development's Urban Homesteading program is what you are referring to. However, funding for the program will end in September 1991 and there are no homes available in the Washington area. About 700 homes nationwide are available to low and moderate income families in approximately 100 communities. Since those communities advertise their availability heavily, you'd probably know if one was available in your area.

For more information on HUD's program, write for a copy of Urban Homesteading, publication 409X. The cost is \$.50. It is available from R. Woods, Consumer Information Center-V, P.O. Box 100, Pueblo, Colo., 81002. Make the check payable to the Superintendent of Documents.

**If you have a consumer problem you need help solving, send your written inquiry to:**

U.S. Department of Commerce  
Room 5718  
Herbert C. Hoover Building  
Washington, D.C. 20230



## Adventures in Data Collecting

Friday, May 12 —  
All At Sea

*At the Newark container terminal, where I have been waiting with the ship for seven hours to depart, a middle-aged career woman is about as common as a giraffe who's somehow wandered into a cow pasture. I am tremendously excited about doing this — going to sea to actually take the types of measurements that I've been hearing, reading, and writing about as part of my job as an international affairs specialist with NOAA's National Ocean Service.*

For the past nine years, the *Oleander*, a merchant ship of the Bermuda Container Line, has participated in the NOAA Voluntary Observing Ship (VOS) program. VOS is a partnership between the commercial shipping industry and the government to collect ocean data for weather-forecasting, climate monitoring, and fisheries research. The equipment most of these ships carry can relay data via radio or satellite. In less than 10 minutes, the data is transmitted to a receiving station at Wallops Island, Va., and relayed to the National Meteorological Center in Suitland, Md. for use in weather forecast models.

As costs for operating research vessels can be as high as \$40,000 a day, this is a valuable voluntary service that these merchant ships provide.

Each month, the *Oleander* carries NOAA volunteers to operate the observing equipment.

The following excerpt is Muriel Cole's account of a week on the *Oleander*. It recently appeared in NOAA's Marine Weather Log.

\* \* \* \* \*

Capt. J.J. Vrolyk of the *Oleander* is concerned, like most masters, about the quality of marine forecasts: "To make an accurate forecast, the more data the better. On land you have observation stations, at sea you have to rely on ships. The information we give, we get back in better weather forecasts."

The *Oleander* and the Bermuda Container Line don't just talk a good game. For the past five years they have taken a voluntary data collector, usually a NOAA employee, for one week each month on the *Oleander*'s scheduled weekly run between Newark, N.J., and Hamilton, Bermuda. I was one of those volunteers. The following notes are taken from the diary of a first time mariner:

The crew — six Dutch and six Caribbean, all bilingual — are very friendly. At the Newark container terminal, where I have been waiting with the ship for seven hours to depart, a middle-aged career woman is about as common as a giraffe who's somehow wandered into a cow pasture. I am tremendously excited about doing this — going to sea to actually take the types of measurements that I've been hearing, reading, and writing about as part of my job as an international affairs specialist with NOAA's National Ocean Service. This kind of ocean measurements — temperature vs. depth and salinity, for example — is now recognized as being extremely important to our ability to understand our environment and predict short-term and long-term weather and climate changes.

NOAA volunteers are enlisted, trained and transported to and from Newark. Training is important. Things can go wrong, causing data to be useless: the equipment can malfunction, or the volunteer can make an inadvertent error. Expendable bathythermographs (XBTs), a measuring instrument that the volunteer throws over the side each hour for 18-24 hours, cost \$30 each, so they alone are a costly investment.

At first, I am nervous and embarrassed about not knowing how to take the observations; after all, I do work for NOAA. I screw up on the very first XBT toss, wasting it. The captain assures me that within a few hours I will be a pro, and he is right, sort of. It gets easier, though by about the 20th hour, the term endurance test does seem appropriate.



**Saturday, May 13—**

**Are We Having Fun yet?**

"Is it still fun, or is it wearing a bit thin?" questions the captain, as I enter the bridge to send a satellite message for the sixteenth hour straight. "Oh, it's still fun," I reply, lying though my teeth. I am mad at myself for making a lot of stupid mistakes, and I feel like a sick oyster at low tide at this point.

Although I don't finish my observing duties until 5 p.m. the next day, I bottom out about 4 a.m. in my attitude about this odyssey. After 10 hourly rounds of stumbling around in the dark to lower a heavy bucket over the side and hauling cold sea water back in on a totally greasy line, getting covered each time with black gook, I want to come face-to-face with a scientist and scream, "Why don't you collect your own damn data?"

**Sunday, May 14 —**

**A Good Night's Sleep**

I have made a miraculous recovery. It's remarkable how 12 hours of sleep, a hot shower, and clean clothes can improve one's outlook. I no longer feel pathetic, and I no longer look like a total scuzz. Now that I'm a free woman again, I can play with this laptop computer in my room all day and peer out at the wavy expanse, with the reassuring hum of the engines in the background. I am thrilled to have done this.

**Monday, May 15 —**

**Beyond the Call of Duty**

Following my 12-hour rejuvenation period, I reappear at the bridge around 10 a.m. "Oh, just in time for some fun," the captain tells me, as he holds up a brand new bright orange survival suit that looks like something from the costume wardrobe on a science fiction movie set.

"A test?" I ask. "Yes, and that includes you, too. It will mess up your hair, that's the only thing," he replies. He explains that this drill has not been attempted before. So we all, supposedly in groups of six, get into lifejackets — huge ones with headrests fastened in place — only to realize we've goofed up and were supposed to don the survival suits first, followed by the life jackets. The suits are really quite clever things, with whistles here and there and velcro-fastened pockets containing big mittens and rubber zippers and wrist cuffs.

I have been reluctant to spend much time with the officers and crew because I've felt (1) conspicuous, (2) exhausted, and (3) self-absorbed. But today I joined them for their noon-time drink in the captain's quarters. They ask me what all the NOAA people do in Washington, and I mention lawyers, which gets a laugh and the Exxon Valdez oil spill, which is not their favorite topic of conversation. I now feel comfortable enough physically and mentally to actually eat a whole meal with them, instead of just pushing my food around on my plate and looking forward to working so I have an excuse to take my queasy stomach and tired body away from the table.

**Tuesday, May 16 —**

**It's not all Work**

An off-duty engineer, a lanky Dutchman who reads Stephen King novels, and I spend the afternoon looking for the best spots on the ship to catch some rays. It's beautiful out here. The crew from Barbados is painting orange spots all over the place, supposedly to retard rust, but I think how nicely the ship now matches our survival get-up. This is a color-coordinated place.

Last year, a new, larger Oleander carrying more sophisticated equipment was christened in Port Elizabeth, N.J. Because the Oleander has been a particularly active partner in the NOAA program, volunteering to collect not only meteorological and oceanographic data, but biological data as well, Deputy Under Secretary Gray Castle attended the christening to show NOAA appreciation. Castle presented the president of the Bermuda Container Line a plaque for participating in the ongoing partnership to collect ocean data.

For more information about VOS, or if you wish to participate in the program, contact:

**Robert Benway, program manager, Marmat Ships of Opportunity Program, NOAA-NMFS, (401) 782-3200.**

In the evening we watch a video movie and afterwards can see Bermuda on the radar, 26 miles away. Now we are anchoring for the night, one mile off the coast, and I decide to check out the ship, startling one of the crew who is in his underwear, getting ready to fish. By midnight most everyone is on the stern in the moonlight dangling bottles, Sprite cans, anything. In they haul little sheepshead, grunts, butterfish, and snappers.

In the morning we dock and get the immigration and customs clearances to leave the ship. I get off and look for the nearest pay telephone to call home to say I nailed it.



# Personnel Dialogue: **Job Access for the Handicapped**

**Q.** I heard that there is a special employment program for people with disabilities. What is it and how does it work at Commerce?

**A.** In January, the department began operations of an Automated Selective Placement Information and Referral for Employment System (ASPIRES). ASPIRES is an automated applicant referral program which provides people with disabilities an opportunity to be considered for vacant positions when they meet basic and selective qualification requirements.

ASPIRES can be accessed by the department's personnel units through the telecommunications network. Currently, ASPIRES has 50 applicants in the data base. A selective placement program officer refers about ten applicants a week to various personnel offices.

**Q.** I have a friend who is hearing-impaired and is looking for a job. How can she find out about job openings at Commerce?

**A.** The department has a 24-hour job information hotline for the hearing impaired. The hotline provides callers with a listing of the names and addresses of current job openings, along with the names and address of the personnel office handling the vacancy announcement. Callers may access this hotline by using a TTD device to call (202) 377-5246.

**Q.** As a supervisor, what kinds of "desk records" can I keep about my employees?

**A.** Sometimes supervisors keep a work folder for each of their employees. Typically, this folder contains copies of recent personnel actions, training forms, activity and status

reports, performance notes and ratings, awards, and a record of any relevant conversations. There also may be information as to whom to contact in the event of an emergency.

If you keep such work folders, you are responsible for filing any documents in the work folder yourself, and ensuring that the folder is kept in a secure location. A supervisor's working folder records are covered by the Privacy Act. Access is limited to management, the employee concerned, and the individuals who the employee has given written permission.

On the other hand, if you keep personal notes, they are not considered part of the work folder and are not covered by the Privacy Act. Personal notes are restricted for your personal use only, and are not to be circulated or shown to anyone else including other supervisors, your secretary or clerical support staff.

**Q.** I filed an informal grievance with my supervisor. According to the department's policy, my supervisor was supposed to respond within 15 days, but she didn't. Does that mean that I may file a formal grievance?

**A.** Department policy urges management to follow the time limits and issue grievance decisions as quickly as possible, but those limits cannot always be observed. The grievance procedures require that the written response to the employee under the informal procedure be included as part of the formal procedure. So the deciding official of the formal grievance is actually a second level review of the issue. If your supervisor has not issued a notice of decision in response to your informal grievance, there has not yet been a

first level review, and the process cannot move forward. However, you may file a second informal grievance, addressing the supervisor's failure to issue a timely response to the first informal grievance.

**Q.** I am a federal employee participating in the Thrift Savings Plan. I will be moving in the near future and need to know what I have to do to change my address for my Thrift Savings Plan account.

**A.** To change your address for your account, you should contact your personnel office and complete a change of address form, AD-349. Submit this information as soon as possible to ensure that the change will be made in time, so that you can continue to receive your TSP Participant Statement and other important mail from the Thrift Board.

## **Commerce People**

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Letters should be addressed to Erika Morphy, U.S. Department of Commerce, Room 5058, Herbert C. Hoover Building, Washington, D.C. 20230.

News items may be mailed, or phoned in to the editor on FTS 377-4901.

Gary Foster.....OPA Director  
Robert Kaylor .....OPA  
Erika Morphy .....Editor



## Personnel Notes: Sick Leave for Adoptive Parents

**A** provision from the Nov. 5, 1990, Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act provides a feasibility test that covers sick leave to federal employees who are adopting a child. The objective is to put adoptive parents in the federal workforce on an equal footing with women who can use sick leave for prenatal doctor visits.

An adoptive parent may use his or her sick leave to attend appointments with adoption agencies, social workers, attorneys and court proceedings. Since adoption procedures and requirements differ depending on the locality and adoption agency, sick leave for other related activities may be used.

To use sick leave for these activities, a SF-71 leave application must be completed. In addition, documentation that the sick leave was used for the stated purpose must also be provided.

Employee participation in the test ends Sept. 30, 1991.

## Filing Your Financial Disclosure Report

**E**very year, senior executives and other high-level employees are required to file a public financial disclosure report (Form SF-278).

The time to file is approaching. If you are one of these employees, you will receive notice and the forms from your personnel office, as soon as the new forms are printed.

The Ethics Reform Act of 1989 instituted certain changes in the financial disclosure requirements. The three most significant changes are:

- **New SF-278 Forms.** The Office of Government Ethics is revising this form to reflect the changes in reporting requirements.
- **Category of Value.** Two new categories of value have been added for reporting assets, liabilities, and transactions between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000 and in excess of \$1,000,000.
- **Fine for Late Filing.** A late filing fee of \$200 may be imposed on anyone who files a report later than 30 days after the due date.

Reporting of income, honoraria, gifts, travel reimbursements, investment funds, and prior compensation are other areas that have changed requirements.

The deadline for filing the SF-278 is May 15. These reports are available to the public upon request.

## There is a New GS-343 Position Classification Standard

**I**f you are one of the department's 270 program analysts, don't be surprised if you receive a standard form 50 (notification of personnel action) changing your series from GS/GM-345 to GS/GM-343.

The Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) 1990 Position Classification Standard for Management and Program Analysis Series GS-343, abolishes the GS-345 series and combines program analysis and management analysis work into a single series. OPM conducted an occupational study of both types of positions in 1988, and found that the knowledge required for both series were similar enough for the series and position classifications to be consolidated.

The new management and program analysis series, GS-343, covers positions which "primarily serve as analysts and advisors to management

on the evaluation of the effectiveness of government programs and operations or the productivity and efficiency of the management of federal agencies or both."

Management and program analysts will keep their previous titles — the only change is the series classification. The exception will be the few positions which devote the same amount of time to both functions. These positions will be titled Management and Program Analyst.

The grade level of nonsupervisory GS/GM-343 positions will be determined through a separate instruction entitled the Administrative Analysis Grade Evaluation Guide. This guide is formatted in the Factor Evaluation System (FES). Grading of supervisory positions, like before, will be determined by the Supervisory Grade Evaluation Guide (SGEG).



### Marilyn Quayle Visits NIST Facility

*Second Lady Marilyn Quayle and NIST Director John Lyons prepare to ignite a test fire in the NIST fire research laboratory during her recent visit to the facility. Measurements taken from the full-scale room fire test will be used by NIST researchers to monitor and measure how a fire will burn and how materials in the room contribute to fire growth. The vice president's wife, who is interested in disaster preparedness, also visited NIST's large structural testing laboratory and high-voltage pulse laboratory. NIST researchers are working to improve the performance of buildings and other structures subject to earthquakes, fires, and other disasters. Looking on is Richard Zile, supervisor of the facility.*



### At last: Something To Do With Those Empty Soda Cans

**T**he Hoover building has been taking part in a paper recycling program for over a year now, and it has been very successful. Almost every Commerce employee has a recycling box near his or her desk, including Secretary Mosbacher, who uses his regularly.

Last year the recycling program collected over 200 tons of white paper. That recycled paper saved 3,400 mature trees from being harvested and 660 cubic feet of landfill space from being filled.

As an additional bonus, the sale of the recyclable paper has generated almost \$8,000 in revenue for the printing division.

The recycling program has now expanded to include the collection of newspapers, aluminum cans, and glass bottles. Recycling containers for these products can be found throughout the building.

Persons with questions about recycling or pickup of recycled materials should call Building Management at (202) 377-1340.